

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers

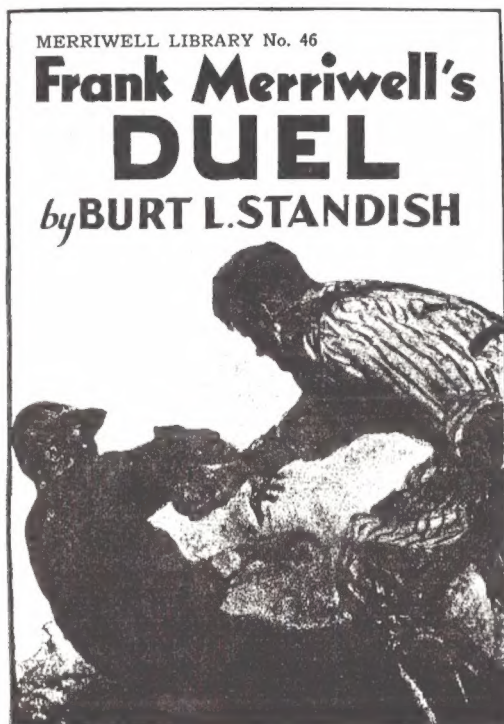
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By James L. Evans, The University of Texas — Pan American



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PORTRAYAL OF BIG FOOT WALLACE IN BEADLE DIME NOVELS

By James L. Evans, The University of Texas — Pan American

Bigfoot¹ Wallace was an actual person who became a Texas folk hero. As an adult, he stood six feet two in moccasins, weighed two hundred and forty pounds without surplus fat, and had gigantic feet.

William Alexander Anderson Wallace was born in Virginia in 1817. He was a descendant of Scottish Highlanders among whom the clan instinct was strong. Soon after a brother and cousin were killed by Mexicans during the Texas War for Independence in 1836, he came to Texas determined to get revenge by killing many Mexicans. When he arrived in Central Texas though, very few Mexicans were fighting there, but he soon joined a scouting group eager to kill some hostile Indians. Thus, his career as a Texas scout began. In his early adulthood he spent considerable time in Austin and San Antonio, but because these towns were becoming too populated for him, in 1845 (at the age of 28), he built a cabin on the Medina River about twenty miles southwest of the Alamo. He used it as his home and headquarters for most of his adult life.

He participated in filibustering expeditions in Mexico, was captured, and was led through Mexican cities as a prisoner; he drove a mail wagon through the Indian-infested area from San Antonio to El Paso; he farmed near his cabin. But he is known primarily as a scout who protected and saved settlers in Central Texas by killing Indians and Mexicans in great numbers.

He never had much money nor wanted much. He never married, and he never lost a tooth. He lived largely on wild animals he shot. He was usually called Big Foot, and there are at least three different tales explaining the basis for this name. His uncouth nature, his big feet, and his frontier experiences contributed to making him a frontier hero. A town about five miles east of Devine and thirty-five miles from downtown San Antonio was named Bigfoot for him. In his old age he lived with friends near there. The town, which once had stores and more than three hundred inhabitants, has dwindled to a village of fewer than one hundred. Today it has no stores, but it does still have active churches, the Post Office of Bigfoot, the Bigfoot Wallace Museum, and some elderly residents who have heard tales of Big Foot Wallace all their lives. The stories they heard as children from persons who had actually known Big Foot often contradict the usual legends. In October, 1990, I talked to Mrs. Temple Thomas, an elderly woman who has lived in Bigfoot all her life. She said that persons she had known who had known Big Foot said that he was not really as wild as the stories tell.

But Big Foot certainly liked to tell of his experiences, and he especially liked to "stretch the blanket," as telling tall tales was called. By the time Big Foot Wallace reached middle age, the tales he told and the tales told about him had made him into a folk hero. Two book-length biographies were written about him during his lifetime, one by John C. Duval and one by A. J. Sowell. Both of these men had known Big Foot personally, but general belief is that they were more eager to create a great folk character by using picturesque language and by stretching the blanket than they were to tell the literal truth.

Though Wallace led groups of scouts over a period of several decades,

he is remembered as a folk hero rather than as a military leader, and as stated by THE HANDBOOK OF TEXAS, "as a folk hero he belongs more to social than to military history."²

Big Foot Wallace is also a character in numerous dime novels written before he was an old man. This article will tell about him as a character in several Beadle dime novels by Samuel H. Hall, better known as Buckskin Sam.³ Hall himself had spent about twenty years in Central Texas in the 1850s and 1860s, and during his years as a scout had often fought Indians and Mexicans and drunk whiskey with Big Foot.

The locale of these stories is genuine. The specific places mentioned are actual ones in the areas where Big Foot and Hall had scouted. Hall, did, however, unhesitatingly deviate from factual history, and he made up the plots of his dime novels.

The exact time of the events is not given, and since incidents do not correspond with historical events, a reader sometimes cannot place the events within a decade. Seemingly all of these stories take place after the Civil War, and the character of Big Foot always seems at least middle-aged. When Hall first met Big Foot in the 1850s, Big Foot was nearly forty. The stories also suggest that everyone's great respect for Big Foot is due to his wisdom of frontier life that had developed over a period of many years—even though we had supposedly regarded Wallace as a superman upon his arrival in Texas at the age of nineteen.

Big Foot's size is important in making him larger than life. The author often calls him "the big scout" or refers to "his big frame."

Hall sometimes makes his story more convincing by stating in the early part that he had fought in Texas with Big Foot and knew him personally. In all of these stories Big Foot has the role of a bigger-than-life Superman whose presence solves the problems of the frontier. For example, in *DL 349*, entitled *WILD WOLF, THE WACO; OR, BIG-FOOT WALLACE TO THE FRONT. A TRUE TALE OF TEXAS*, the Comanches on the warpath have killed several members of the Green family, burned their farm home, and captured the elderly father and surviving daughter. Indians are also ready to destroy all the homes and inhabitants in the area. Halfway through this story, Big Foot arrives, and the other characters and the readers naturally know that through numerous problems might continue to exist, Big Foot will provide solutions. In this story, the author says that Big Foot is "Invincible, when pitted against the bandits of the Rio Grande, or the red pirates of the plains, whom he mowed down like blades of grass." (349-10-1)⁴ Shortly after introducing Big Foot in *DL 442*, the author says: "So great was the dread that all lawless men, white, red, and yellow had of the giant scout, and so keen was he in ferreting out crime,..." (442-7-3)

Not always is Big Foot a major character in terms of space; sometimes he does not appear till far into the story and is mentioned in only a fraction of the short chapters after his appearance. Thus, Hall has more time to give vivid details of the crime and cruelty by Indian savages and Mexican bandits, and thus, the need for a savior such as Big Foot is all the greater. And Big Foot, of course, always solves the immediate problem, and at the same time adds action to the story by killing Indians and Mexicans.

Usually the military status of the group is vague and the chain of command non-existent. Often the reader does not know whether the scouts are a government-organized unit or merely a group of individuals acting on their own; ordinarily the men are certainly not a regular army unit. Whether or not Big Foot is officially in charge is not clear, and is not important, but other men always defer to his decisions. For example, in *DL 90*, when he once gave orders, we are told that "all obeyed—for he was

the acknowledged leader in all small parties he chanced to be with—" (90-11-1) This attitude is due to several things—Big Foot's superior knowledge of Indian and Mexican behavior, his knowledge of the frontier area and terrain, and his superiority in determining military behavior; and in all of Hall's stories, these traits result from Big Foot's years of experience on the Texas frontier. Big Foot is daring and "reckless to a fault" but realistic and basically practical.

He gives practical advice to young scouts—advice that will enable them to survive and also to kill Indians and Mexicans. A typical example is when he tells one: "...yer sum on Reds, I know, but yer young, an' rather fight than run or keep clear of it by watchin' ther ground. If yer see a trail, know afore yer leave it whar it's agoin', an' if thar's any chances for 'em tew run ag'in yer." (3-17-2)

Even though each dime novel implies that readers know Big Foot before his initial appearance in the story, Hall usually introduces Big Foot by giving a detailed description of him. And Big Foot soon begins talking; his conversations both add humor to the story and help reveal his personality. When first introducing Big Foot in DL 90, Hall states that he was "noted as one of the most successful rangers and scouts of the Texas frontier" and "was of great build, with very large feet for even a man of his size." (90-7-2) Hall then adds: "He was clad in a complete suit of tattered buck skin, made of his own hands, in rude frontier style; his long, dark-brown hair and grizzly beard gave him a rough, wild appearance; but when you looked in his eyes you felt sure that he was a man you could trust in an emergency, even with your life. A broad-brimmed, black sombrero, was slouched carelessly on the back of his head; and his belt contained two large, old-fashioned Colt's revolvers. A huge bowie-knife and a Sharp's rifle, made up his fit-out [outfit] in the way of arms." (90-7-2) Other dime novels, as well as the general legend, give similar accounts of his dress. For example, in DL 204, where Big Foot appears at the very beginning of the story, Hall states that "He was clothed in buckskin breeches, tucked into huge cow-hide boots, a coarse woolen shirt and black sombrero with wide brim—in fact, Big Foot never felt easy and natural when he had anything new about his 'make-up,' for, in purchasing a sombrero, for example, he would kick it up and down the plaza until it resembled a hat somewhat worn, and roll around camp, 'ter git,' as he would say, 'ther stiffenin' outen fresh leggins er shirt.'" (204-2-1)

It is logical that when a stranger once calls him "Mr. Wallace," Big Foot's partner says that calling him "Mister" makes Big Foot "sick" and that Big Foot doesn't "skin off" his clothes more than once or twice a moon and he takes a soak with fish just to be sociable with them. (204-2-1)

And when Big Foot meets a character identified as a good guy from the East needing help in Texas, Big Foot offers to be his partner. Big Foot says, however, "[Even] Ef yer does w'ar a b'iled shirt an' a heap of other civilized fixin's, yer chuck full o' starch, an' I'm bettin' yer squar' an' white." (186-9-3) The introduction of Big Foot in DL 186 mentions the rifle, lariat, canteen, rolled up serape, and says, "From the general appearance...one might suppose him to be a hard character, but one look into his blue eyes, so honest in their expression, would cause a speedy change in opinion." (186-12-1)

When one white scoundrel considers hiring Big Foot for protection on a trip, a fellow crook says: "...He's as honest as Ben Franklin, and money won't hire him to go on a crooked trail..." The friend replies, "I think I have heard you say a good many times...that every man has his price." To this, the man acquainted with Big Foot adds: "Well, perhaps you have,...but the big scout is an exception." (204-12-1) This situation well

represents the attitude toward Big Foot—the man in real life and the character in dime novels. True, he kills Indians left and right, but Big Foot and others believe his doing so is a virtue.

In expository statements we often hear of Big Foot's chewing and spitting tobacco, his killing an animal to eat, his great appetite, his drinking whiskey straight to keep his brains from going on a stampede (186-10-1), his hatred of Indians and Mexicans, and their fear of him. Yet as one story says, he is always "as kindly as a woman, and as innocent as a child." (204-2-2)

The speech of Big Foot is quite significant. His slang expressions and his use of dialect create humor, and nearly all his comments are well integrated into the story. When showing surprise, he uses his favorite expression: "Well, danged my half-sister's black cat." And when he wishes to show great surprise, he says, "Well, danged everything my half-sister ever owned." Some of his other favorite expressions are "By ther blood o' Davy Crockett," "By ther jumpin' Ge-hoss-i-fat! and all Ge-ru-cilem!" and "Bet yer sculp." Examples of his picturesque speech are, "Now, I'm ready tew swar, with my right claw on the Alamo-walls" (3-17-1), "ef I mayn't be sculped by a six-year-old squaw" and "Strange things turns up so dang'd suddent an' queer, thet I'm gettin' ready fer ther see ter sun flop over and stompede." (186-28-3 and 186-29-1)

Often his comments contribute to the progress of the story. Frequently in a crisis Big Foot summarizes the situation to the other scouts (for the benefit of the readers) and then announces his decision of what to do, thereby informing the other scouts and the readers what to expect. And often the reader is informed about situations by the author's comments about what Big Foot thinks, wonders, knows, or reasons to be the case.

Big Foot never felt comfortable in female or polite company. There are several well known stories of the historic Big Foot being ditched by a girl during his temporary baldness resulting from an illness; also, there are tales of his being saved by an ugly Indian squaw who wanted him for a husband. In the town of Bigfoot, Temple Thomas told me that there are reports that Big Foot stayed in Texas permanently because a girl he left back in Virginia had married another man during his absence.

Nevertheless, in the dime novels Big Foot is a confirmed bachelor who apparently never had any romantic inclinations at all. He is a protector of women and often saves them from Indians, but he is uncomfortable in any personal relationship with them. In DL 204, someone in San Antonio gives Big Foot a note from a woman who wants to talk to him about being her protector on a trip. The author comments that many bystanders "roared with laughter" because "they all knew that the famous scout and ranger would mch rather take his chances in a charge into a Comanche war party, than to be forced to converse, or make an attempt that way, with a woman, old or young, for ten minutes." Then Big Foot himself says: "...I swar by ther blood o' Crockett I wouldn't sling tongue fer five minits with a female woman for fifty saddle-nags. What in thunderation does ther caliber-kivered [calico-covered] humans mean by gittin' cl'ar outen civilize?" (204-2-3)

Near the end of another story, a fellow scout is getting married. A few minutes before the others, Big Foot "enters the church, seats himself upon the sill of an open window, throwing one leg outside, as it comes more natural to him to straddle something, and nervously awaits..." When the wedding is over, Big Foot instantly leaps out the window, and mutters to himself: "This are the first time I ever war into a Christian factory, an' ther nighest I ever war tew a reg'lar genuine gospel-singer. It's tew danged stiff an' clost here; rec'on I'll pitch fur ther ranch an' see my

cat." (3-27-1)

Big Foot is a true and proud Texan, working for safety and justice on the frontier. In spite of brief allusions to his being the "namesake of Scotland's hero," he lives in his cabin on the isolated Texas prairie—alone except for some animals. At the time of DL 3, he has a pet panther, "an animal of prodigious size," that protects his home and plays a role in the story. During an Indian attack on his cabin, the other scouts hear the Indians' yells of horror and shrieks of agony which were "mingled with the tearing of flesh, the spurting of blood, cracking of bones, and horrible crunching of teeth" by his panther. (3-14-1) When a military officer comments about there being insufficient federal forces to fight Indians and Mexicans in South Texas, Big Foot says: "To the devil with Uncle Samuel ...we [Texans] can fight our own battles, as this day stands proof. Thar hain't been as many yaller-bellies clawed grass afore, in one day, since..." (3-24-2)

But Big Foot's manner of dress, his languages, and his attitudes would not have made him a genuine hero if he were not a man of action. The real action results from his killing Indians and Mexicans for fun and for the safety of Texans. Both his language and his deeds reveal that he is definitely a racist (supposedly because the Indians and Mexicans are bad); he enjoys killing them as much as he enjoys chewing tobacco, and he kills them as nonchalantly as he spits tobacco. After one brief setback by the Indians, he makes a typical announcement: "But Big Foot ain't dead yet, not much. Look out thar, yer greasy, mangy son o' a kiote, er I'll bu'st ther buffler strings an' skin yer head with my finger-nails." (442-11-1)⁵ The Indians and Mexicans create fear in Texas, and the stories indicate that killing them is necessary for safety. The following description from DL 442 is a typical one: "Some three-score of Comanche braves, in all their horrid paraphernalia of savage war-paint, daubed and befeathered, their lances glittering in the light of the setting sun, their plumes flaunting and quirts flying, as they lashed their half-wild steeds in a course directly toward the paralyzed [Texas] youths, and not more than four hundred yards distant." (442-5-2)

Big Foot also loves to encourage others to kill Indians; for example, in DL 3, he tells his scouts: "Don't let a single cuss go back ter his squaw! show your shootin' edication, now, or never!" (3-14-1) And he once tells a young new scout: "...keep by me, an' shoot ther red cusses...Yer'll soon git ter like it, an' it'll cum easy." (90-9-3)

Hall frequently describes Big Foot's killing an Indian. One example reads: "At intervals they [Comanches] stop, and lay silent and prone upon the earth, while Big Foot steals on some careless sentinel, and with his right hand grasping the Indian's neck with an iron grip, the left drives his bowie to the hilt in the heart of the red-skin, and then they move on again...No Indian has a chance to yell, or create a commotion after the Giant of the Border once gets his hands upon him." (3-25-3)

And in another story, we are told that under Big Foot's direction, each Indian guard was "clutched by the throat, thus preventing yells, and knives were plunged into their hearts." Each Indian was then scalped and laid upon a blanket; to enable the Apaches to know who had outwitted them, Big Foot left his "sign"—"by severing the right ear of each—his well-known mark." (349-12-1)

According to rumors, for many years Mexican bandits under Juan Cortina were creating havoc all over South Texas. Both Big Foot and Hall had fought against Cortina and his forces. Accounts of bandit activity, whether in Central Texas or along the Mexican border, add intensity to the stories. Big Foot's adventures in search of Cortina create excitement and

further show Big Foot's desire to help Texas. These adventures also further reveal his hatred of Mexicans. The author repeatedly uses such terms as "desperados and lawless Mexicans" and "most brutal cutthroats and swarthy miscreants." And Big Foot himself refers to Cortina and his followers as "yaller-bellied sons of kiotes," "danged murderin' varmints," and "them pesky cutthruts, them yaller Montezumas" (3-21-1), and he says that he is "itching tew git a rope around ther greasy necks, an' rid the State of sich villa'n'us lookin' ladrones." (3-21-2) Since Cortina was from a prominent and wealthy Mexican family, Big Foot often refers to him as "hifalutin," and since Cortina is of mixed Spanish and Indian blood, Big Foot calls him a "demorelized son ev a squaw." (3-21-1) A typical example of Big Foot's reaction to Cortina is shown in the early part of 442. Upon the arrival of Cortina, Big Foot is overjoyed; he clasped his hand to his revolver, and yelled: "Cortina! Or I'm a bald-headed liar! Whoop up, boyees,...an' pick triggers lively! We've kerral'd ther cussed cut-throat an' his pards. Don't 'low one ter jump his critter [horse]. Scissors! Hyer they come!" (442-2-2)

As a dime novelist, Hall naturally catered to the readers' demands and showed Mexicans as villainous cutthroats, but in his expository material he occasionally states that many persons of Mexican descent are good and honest but are victimized by the cruel injustices of corrupt and prejudiced Americans. Hall never shows Big Foot accepting these ideas, however. It seems to me that both the general legend and Hall's dime novels also emphasize Big Foot's craving of bloodshed, especially the blood of persons he considered to be of an inferior race.

According to the legend, when Big Foot was not fighting Indians or Mexicans, he usually loitered near his cabin on the Medina River and made occasional visits to other farms in the area. In the concluding chapters of dime novels, Hall usually tells what the surviving characters do after the story ends. After DL 3, Big Foot "meanders about up and down the Nueces [River] or San Miguel, catching a mustang, or knocking a deer over, as he chooses." (3-27-2) And the last two sentences of $\frac{1}{2}$ DL 442 tell that Big Foot was "a frequent visitor at the ranch of friends" but "The giant scout, however, was almost constantly in active service" because Cortina had recently "invaded Texas with the largest force of desperate bandits ever under the command of any one man in the two Americas." (442-15-3)

Samuel Hall (Buckskin Sam) was small in size; Big Foot Wallace was a giant. Both were scouts who often fought together on the Texas frontier in the 1850s and 1860s. Except for very brief visits elsewhere, Big Foot spent the remainder of his life in Texas; Sam Hall went back East and in the 1870s became a dime novelist. Since Hall usually wrote about things, places, and persons he had known, he logically wrote several dime novels about Big Foot Wallace, who had already become a legend. Hall basically used the legendary Big Foot, and in doing so, he helped to preserve and popularize the legend of Big Foot Wallace, one of the major folk heroes of Texas.

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DL 3 KIT CARSON, JR., THE CRACK SHOT OF THE WEST. A ROMANCE OF THE LONE STAR STATE.

DL 90 WILL, THE MAD RANCHERO; OR, THE TERRIBLE TEXANS. A ROMANCE OF KIT CARSON, JR., AND BIG FOOT WALLACE'S LONG TRAIL.

DL 186 THE BLACK BRAVO; OR, THE TONKAWAY'S TRIUMPH. A ROMANCE OF THE FRIO RANC.H

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ENDNOTES

¹ Various spellings include: Bigfoot; Big-Foot; and Big Foot. Samuel Hall uses Big Foot; the town is spelled Bigfoot.

² II, 378.

³ Hall, a native New Englander, came to Texas as a teenager in the early 1850s. Both as a scout in Texas and as a dime novelist after he returned East, he was called Buckskin Sam because he always wore a buckskin costume when serving in Texas.

⁴ Quotations in this article are identified in parentheses by number of dime novel, page, and column.

⁵ In Ned Buntline's BIG FOOT WALLACE, THE GIANT HERO OF THE BORDER (Log Cabin Library No. 97), one character says: "—don't kill the squaws!" To this comment, Big Foot cries: "Cuss 'em all—let 'em all have lead!...They never spare our women and children!" (p.2,c.2). In Hall's stories, the Indian squaws and children practically never enter the raids.

* * * * *

BRACEBRIDGE HEMYNG; MAN OR MYTH

By E. M. Sanchez-Saavedra

Edwin J. Brett (1828-1895), England's most successful publisher of boys' journals and "penny bloods," decided to add school stories to his tried and tested formula of pirates and pseudo-historical adventures. His chief competitors at Hogarth House had introduced them in 1867, beginning a craze which lasted well into the twentieth century. Brett hired "Bracebridge Hemyng" (1841-1901), an unsuccessful London barrister, to produce a rival to George Emmett's wildly popular TOM WILDRACE. Although in later years Brett would claim full credit for the result, JACK HARKAWAY'S SCHOOLDAYS and its sequels were Hemyng's own creation.¹

Thanks to the efforts of Mr. W. O. G. Lofts of London, who very kindly shared his valuable research with me, it is possible to glean some official biographical data about the creator of the JACK HARKAWAY saga.²

Possibly to give his name a more aristocratic flavor, he habitually spelled his name with a "y." His family surname, however, was actually spelle "Heming." In THE HOUSE OF BEADLE AND ADAMS, Vol. II, pp. 138-139, Albert Johannsen wrote that he was "born in London in 1841, the eldest son of Dempster Hemyng of the English bar." The birth records at Somerset House, London, do not support this statement. His death certificate at St. Catherines House, London, states that he died between July and September, 1901, at Fulham, aged 58. (This seems to be in error. I would opt for Johannsen's 1841 birth date, for reasons which will appear below.) The India Public Records Office in London has a card index, listing a "Demster Heming" (born December 2, 1843, died 1934), in the Madras Army records.



BRACEBRIDGE HEMING, ESQ., BARRISTER-AT-LAW, AUTHOR OF "JACK HARKAWAY IN AMERICA."

The logical deduction is that Samuel B. Heming and Demster Heming were brothers. The London birth records do list an Edmund Maule Heming, born in 1832, to Samuel Bracebridge Heming and his wife Eliza. He would seem to be the eldest son.

The above data should lead to a tentative conclusion that Samuel B. Heming, Sr., had at least three sons: Edmund M., Samuel B., and Demster. The two younger sons were probably born in India; not a good place to be in the late 1850s. The brutal Sepoy Mutiny and large-scale uprising against the English began in May, 1857. Like most of the children born to East India Company staff, the Heming boys were sent home to England to be

educated. Oddly enough, none of his JACK HARKAWAY adventures was ever set in India. Could it be that his family was massacred, and India had no further charms for him? The Harkaway retinue generally confined its Far East filibustering to the China Sea, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Young Samuel B. Heming entered the third form at Eaton College in 1853 and was in the "remove form" in 1856. His university career is obscure, but his continuing fictional references to Oxford makes it likely that this was his *alma mater*. "Jack Harkaway" was in many ways Heming's alter-ego. Jack graduated St. Aldate's College, Oxford, with a double-first. Heming was admitted to the Middle Temple at London as barrister-at-law on April 30, 1862. (If he had been born in 1843, he would have been only 19 at the time. The 1841 date thus seems more reasonable. One contemporary biographical squib confirms his age as 21 at admission.)

The sole attributed photograph of the author, now known through wood engravings in Frank Leslie's and George Emmett's journals, shows him aged 32 or 33, overweight and dignified, with hair parted in the center and "Dundreary" side-whiskers. (In fact, he resembled a young Chester A. Arthur.) A colleague, James W. Allingham (Ralph Rollington" of *The Boy's World*), who knew him in the 1880s, recalled in 1913:

"Hemyng, when I first met him, was a tall handsome man, and every inch a gentleman. He spoke with a slight American accent, and seldom raised his voice above the conversational tone." When excited, he would rub his hands together and extend his arms several times, observing, "Guess that's what the Americans call 'shifting your linen.'"³

According to the published "Law List," Heming remained in active practice for a decade, working as legal counsel when he could obtain briefs. While waiting for clients, he wrote several adult novels, dealing with racing frauds, crime and seduction, and a variety of sketches and juvenile stories. Michael Sadleir's catalogue of 19TH CENTURY FICTION attributes at least some of George Vickers's yellow-back novels in the so-called "Anonyma" series to Hemyng. "Ralph Rollington's" memoirs included the information that "Brace Hemyng was a most prolific writer...He wrote several serials for the *London Journal*...the SKITTLES and KATE HAMILTON group...etc." Much of the fourth volume of Henry Mayhew's LONDON LABOUR AND THE LONDON POOR was his work, revealing an intimate knowledge of the sarmier side of urban life. By this time, he was already signing himself "S. B. Hemyng" or "Bracebridge Hemyng." Much of his work appeared anonymously in Edwin Brett's journals, although many adult serials were signed.

He was married at least twice. Johannsen cites an article in *The Newsman*, for September, 1885, claiming that his first wife was mentally unbalanced. She would throw handy objects at her husband and his guests during her seizures. During their residence in America, she wandered half-clad into the woods one cold night and died of exposure. After his return to London, he seems to have remarried and resumed his legal practice. The legal profession, it seems, used him as badly as it had twenty years before, and he continued to write fiction to pay the bills. (His contemporary, young Dr. Arthur Conan Doyle, had turned to fiction for the same reason, while waiting for patients in an empty consulting-room.)

He died intestate in 1901, ending his days in poverty in a Fulham flat. A form of paralysis may have been the cause. A nephew, Bracebridge Heming, wrote several juvenile books in the period of the First World War, but used the original spelling of the family name.

Several researchers have stated, or suggested that "Bracebridge Hemyng" never existed as an individual, but was merely a "house name" used

to cover the output of several hackwriters employed by Edwin Brett. In other words, the man who *called himself* Hemyng, who arrived in New York in late 1873, may not have been christened so. Percy Muir thought that he was an American lawyer residing in London. (Certainly the Frank Leslie author who returned to London in the 1880s had acquired some "Americanisms.")⁴

In addition to the vital statistics unearthed by W. O. G. Lofts, other bits of evidence point conclusively to the existence of Samuel Bracebridge Heming.

First is his pre-Brett literary output, including the essays on prostitution in Mayhew's LONDON LABOUR AND THE LONDON POOR, published in 1861-1862.

Second is the notarized statement, made after his arrival in New York, before Charles M. Stafford, Notary Public, that:

"Whereas, it has come to my knowledge that some English publishers are trying to impose upon the readers of the United States an imitation of my story, "Jack Harkaway," I freely declare that I am the sole author of "Jack Harkaway at School," "At Sea," "At Oxford," "Among the Brigands," and "In America," and further that I am writing only for Mr. Frank Leslie, and am not in any way connected with any publications but those bearing his name."⁵

On the same day, he wrote the following note to George Emmett, editor of *The Young Englishman*:

"Gilsey House Hotel

"New York, America, March 25, 1874

"My Dear George Emmett,—

"Excuse me for troubling you with a matter which you may deem of small importance, but I wish to prevent those English young gentlemen who have been, and are now, my readers, from being imposed upon. I am the sole author of the 'Harkaway' and the 'Scapegrace' stories. The only boys' story I have written since my arrival in America is 'Jack Harkaway in America' which is published by your well-known firm. Will you kindly take steps to let the boys know this, and to beware of imitations of my story?

"I am, my dear Emmett,

"Yours very truly,

"BRACEBRIDGE HEMYNG."⁶

Third is Brett's own statement, which questions Hemyng's importance to the series, but *never* his physical existence.

(Henry Carter, an expatriate English wood-engraver turned publisher in New York, stole dozens of Brett's serials. Carter, who had his name legally changed to "Frank Leslie," had begun his famous *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* in 1855, in direct imitation of *The Illustrated London News*. The success of Brett's *Boys of England* inspired two further imitations: *Frank Leslie's Boys of America* and *Frank Leslie's Boys and Girls' Weekly*. Leslie knew a good thing when he saw it, and the free material in Brett's London journals proved irresistible.)

According to Brett, Leslie's "appropriation...became so extensive that he determined...to stop such unwarrantable proceedings," and threatened legal action against Leslie.

"Mr. Leslie being in London...called at Mr. Brett's offices, and there made terms of payment if Mr. Brett would permit him still to use stories and engravings for his American works...Mr. Brett at the interview having recognized Mr. Leslie as an old London wood engraver, made arrangements

with him to pay a small sum for permission to use Mr. Brett's stories and engravings.

"Mr. Brett, after bestowing this favor on Mr. Leslie, thus assisting him to forward the sale of his works, found that Mr. Leslie was not satisfied...but followed this up by writing secretly to his assistants." (The term "assistants" refers to the anonymous writers employed by Brett.)

"Mr. Hemyng's share in the Jack Harkaway stories, as regards invention, is but slight, he having to attend on Mr. Brett, to receive instructions as to plot, incidents, and characters for forthcoming numbers." Brett pointed out that "some authors employed on his works are paid as much as 6, 8, and 12 pds. per number. Mr. Hemyng, for his share in the Harkaway stories, received 2 pds. per number."⁷

Leslie managed to locate Bracebridge Hemyng and for the princely sum of \$10,000.00 per annum persuaded the impoverished barrister to sail to America. At the time, Hemyng was only getting about two pounds sterling, or \$10.00, per week for an 8,000-word installment. JACK HARKAWAY AMONG THE BRIGANDS was still in progress when Hemyng "defected" to Frank Leslie in the winter of 1873.

Fourth is J. W. Allingham's reminiscence about Hemyng's appearance and mannerisms (supra).

Fifth is the woodcut published by George Emmett, with a brief biographical sketch. As Brett's sworn business enemy, it would have been to Emmett's advantage to expose his rival's star author as a fraud. Instead, Emmett wrote that:

"this gentleman was called to the bar at the early age of twenty-one, but soon after entered the literary world, in which he has been eminently successful.

"At one time he devoted time and labour to expose the villainy practised on the turf, and his works on this subject gained a world-wide circulation and lasting reputation for the author."⁸

(Note that his age at admission to the bar was 21, further supporting the 1841 birth date.)

Last is the noticeable change in writing style in the JACK HARKAWAY serials after Hemyng's defection in 1873. The original author of JACK HARKAWAY definitely quit Brett's series and started Leslie's "American" line.

In addition to his tales of JACK HARKAWAY IN AMERICA and among the Malay pirates, Hemyng's by-line appeared over twenty-eight serials and novelettes between 1874 and 1884, (including RALPH RATTLE signed by "Jack Harkaway,") in Leslie's publications alone. Obviously, the author was earning his \$10,000.00 per year with a vengeance. His DICK LIGHTHEART; OR, THE SCAPEGRACE AMONG THE REDSKINS, which ran in *Boys of America* from July, 1875, to September, 1876, may be considered a serious contender for the bloodiest, most sadistic, dime novel ever published.⁹

Freed from Brett's editorial tyranny, Hemyng's fictional characters blossomed in the free soil of America. Instead of dutifully performing a sort of Victorian *Bushido* against cardboard backdrops of English imperial dominions, the Harkaway family and their swarming retinue developed tentative three-dimensional personalities within fairly authentic settings. Although the stories are definitely period pieces, they are curiously amoral, and must have been a refreshing change from the heavy-handed sermonizing of most American fiction at the time.

As the new chapters gushed from Hemyng's pen, week after week, Brett's chief competitor, Charles Fox of Hogarth House, secured the sole English copyright from Frank Leslie, and began reprinting them in *The*

Young Englishman and *The Young Briton*. Leslie's sale of the publishing rights to Brett's bitterest rival was an act of revenge worthy of the Harkaway saga.

Frank Leslie made the most of his star author and worked him like a drayhorse until his publishing business faltered in the financial panic of 1877. Hemyng's output diminished after Leslie had trouble meeting his payrolls, and he contributed pieces to other magazines.

Leslie died of throat cancer in 1880, and his strong-willed widow (who had once been Lola Montez's partner in a "sister act"), carried on the business successfully, after legally changing her name to "Frank Leslie." Hemyng's stories were reprinted several times in various Leslie publications, including paper-covered volumes which resembled Brett's shilling books.

Hemyng remained in America for six or seven years, living beyond his means on Staten Island.

In April, 1879, Beadle and Adams published a strange Harkaway variant in their *Young New-Yorker* and *Half-Dime Library* entitled JACK HARKAWAY IN NEW YORK; OR, THE ADVENTURES OF THE TRAVELERS' CLUB, under Hemyng's by-line. This tale does not resemble either the English or American stories in style or continuity. Yet when the story and four others appeared in Beadle publications, Hemyng was still in New York, so we may tentatively attribute them as his writing. (There is considerable disagreement as to Hemyng's whereabouts at this time. Albert Johannsen, in *THE HOUSE OF BEADLE AND ADAMS*, II, 138-139, believed that Hemyng was in New York from 1873 to 1879. Other sources indicate that he returned to London briefly in 1878-1879, when Leslie's financial health problems had become acute, but came back to America in 1879, where he remained until 1887.)¹⁰

According to the American dime-novel collector, Charles Bragin, "Hemyng resented any hint of interference by a publisher. When, upon leaving Leslie, he went to work for a publisher who tried to tell him how to write his stories, he began to kill off his principal characters so rapidly that his series threatened to become extinct. The publisher capitulated and humbly promised to let Hemyng write as he pleased."¹¹

When Hemyng moved back to England, the Harkaway craze had run its course, and he had to return to anonymous freelance writing for Brett and others. Throughout the 1890s, there were several attempts at a Harkaway revival. He may well have written a Harkaway story published in George Newnes's *British Boys* in 1896, and the two Boer War Harkaway tales which appeared in the *Up-To-Date Boys' Journal*, successor to the old *Boys of England* in 1899-1900.

Of the JACK HARKAWAY canon, Samuel B. Heming personally wrote the following:

For Edwin J. Brett's *Boys of England*, 1871-1873:

JACK HARKAWAY'S SCHOOLDAYS, 1871-1872

JACK HARKAWAY'S AFTER SCHOOL DAYS; HIS ADVENTURES AFLOAT AND ASHORE,
1872

JACK HARKAWAY AT OXFORD, 1872-1873

JACK HARKAWAY AMONG THE BRIGANDS, 1873 (partim.)

For Frank Leslie's *Boys' and Girls' Weekly*:

JACK HARKAWAY IN AMERICA, in five parts, 1874-1876

YOUNG JACK HARKAWAY IN SEARCH OF HIS FATHER, in three parts, 1878

THE SLAVE OF THE MINE; OR, JACK HARKAWAY IN 'FRISCO, 1879.

Authorship of all other Harkaway stories published by Brett, George

Newnes and Frank Tousey is problematic. Tousey ran three "American" adventures in his *Happy Days* story paper and nineteen titles in his *Five Cent Wide Awake Library* between 1895 and 1897. None of them even remotely resembles Heming's style. Brett's series of JACK HARKAWAY AND HIS SON'S ADVENTURES ROUND THE WORLD and YOUNG JACK HARKAWAY AND HIS BOY TINKER, which ran from 1874 through 1876, were ghostwritten after Heming's departure for New York, late in 1873.¹²

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- ¹¹ *The Saturday Evening Post*, August 3, 1946, p. 62.
- ¹² This attribution is based on my own reading of the Harkaway canon and a two-part article by W. M. Burns: "The Works of Bracebridge Hemyng," in *Dime Novel Roundup*, Vol. 13, No. 152-153, May-June, 1945. Also see Edward T. LeBlanc, "Jack Harkaway," in *Dime Novel Roundup*, Vol. 58, No. 1, February, 1989, for an excellent overview of the series.

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